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SUBJECT: KUWAIT MEDIA REACTION -- JANUARY 20 INAUGURATION

SUMMARY

Thursday, January 22, 2009

11. (U) Summary and Comment. As of Thursday, January 22, all the Arabic and English dailies continued to publish headlines and pictures about the January 20 Inauguration Day ceremony. In addition to the front-page coverage, many columnists commented positively on the event from different perspectives. While some columnists opined regionally, others commented on the story from a local point of view. A number of columnists believed that President Obama's biggest challenge will be Palestine. Other columnists focused on the all-inclusive religious aspects of the inauguration, as well as President Obama's allusions to reconciliation with the Muslim world. One columnist considered the inauguration to be a platform used by Americans to demonstrate that democracy is the best form of government. Finally, one prominent columnist wrote an article in the form of a letter addressed to President Obama asking what will happen to the 'Roadmap' for Middle East peace. End Summary and Comment.

12. (U) Block quotes:

--Under the headline 'Obama's Inauguration: Highest Cost in History,' the moderate Arabic daily Al-Jarida printed an Op-Ed by liberal columnist Dr. Ghanim Al-Najjar where he concluded (1/20): "The cost of Obama's inauguration is the highest in U.S. history, but I do not know how much other countries, where people are oppressed and are forced to re-elect the same leader for decades, have paid for the re-elections and birthdays of their leaders. But what is more important than this is what Obama will bring to the world. The entire world is watching his first steps. Perhaps the latest Israeli aggression in Gaza is directly related. Obama has taken important and noticeable steps so far on Guantanamo Bay, global warming, stem cell research, etc. But his biggest challenge will be Palestine, and if he can push forward a lasting resolution. Will he pass this test? I wonder! I am not optimistic; if Obama's inauguration was the most expensive in U.S. history, it would be justified if he can bring basic changes to U.S. policy, especially in regards to our region."

--Under the headline "Even If They Were Palestinians!" in the newly established pro-government Arabic daily Awan, the regular columnist Mutlaq Msaed Al-Ajmi commented (01/22): "After taking the oath of office, President Obama gave an inauguration speech, in which he admitted that America is now facing such challenges as the economy and terrorism. He promised to face them along with allies and friends. He also noted that America would not stand in the way of those who are seeking freedom. This is a general principle. We cannot predict how it would be executed in real life. However, we certainly hope that this includes the Palestinian people. Perhaps

some will not surrender to dreams and illusions that America may change its mind after the inauguration of a new president of a different race. However, America is not ruled by a president alone, but rather by laws, institutions, and interests. For that reason, President Obama was clear when he said that some of his Republican predecessor's policies will continue since they are American policies and not the President's even if he were Afghan, Iraqi, Palestinian, or Israeli."

--The regular columnist in the moderate Arabic language daily Al-Qabas, Ali Al-Baghli commented (01/22): "I have seen hundreds of millions of persons around the world who were watching the Inauguration Ceremony of President Obama, the first African-American U.S. President. It was truly a historic moment. What made the speakers proud on that day was that the transition was peaceful and civilized. A Christian pastor gave a sermon in which he thanked God for his grace and praised the American society, a society of values and forgiveness. The pastor did not insult those who are not Christians and did not call them nonbelievers. Instead, he admired every human being regardless of his or her religion and called for co-existence in peace. However, the most powerful words were those of President Obama, who called for reconciliation with the Muslim World. I could not help but to think sadly of the views that we have towards other races and genders. We in Kuwait still call the 'black' people who are citizens and Arabs 'Abeed' [literal Arabic translation of slaves]. This view is rooted in the mentalities of many of us and it shows clearly the gap that lies between our mentality and the American mentality."

--Abdul Latif Al-Duaij, the regular and liberal columnist in the moderate Arabic daily Al-Qabas, noted that (01/22): "The Inauguration Ceremony of President Obama was not only a highly

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prestigious show. It was rather a special occasion through which we became aware of how much democratic principles are rooted in the world at large, particularly in the United States. Even though religion dominated the majority of the festivities, it encompassed all religions. This religion was expressed by the pastor who prayed for the President-elect and the occasion. Equality was indeed very present. The occasion was special since the President-elect was the first African-American U.S. President."

--Dr. Nabil Hawi, head of International News in the moderate Arabic daily Al-Qabas noted (01/21): "To the President of the United States: please accept our congratulations. We salute your insisting upon opening a new chapter with the Islamic world. We are deeply relieved about your commitment to end civil wars and segregation. We -- the Arabs -- are hoping to send you a heartfelt letter of congratulations in which we enclose our requests at a very hard time. We would like to open a new blank page in our dealings as one Arab nation. Today, we address you as we are wrapping up our Arab Summit to confirm that we are able to find a common understanding to save the peace process in the region. The crises are so many and solutions are not impossible. This starts with issues such as oil prices, and includes the ramifications of the economic turmoil, Kuwait's support of Iraq during their transition period, as well as a solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. Last but not least, the only issue that remains is the Israeli war on Gaza and the West Bank. On this issue we urge you that those responsible should be punished for war crimes. However, we find ourselves obliged to ask you: What is the status of the roadmap and the results of the Annapolis Conference?"

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